One of the most important forest products is raffia. This is not only an article of trade, but figures largely in native industries. The raffia palm usually grows in low, moist ground. It attains a height of from 20 to 30 feet. The natives cut the young fronds from the heart of the leaf head just before they begin to open. Care is taken not to cut too deeply, which would injure the tree. The leaflets are then cut from the midrib.

The raffia fiber is a thin, tough membrane which covers both the inner and outer surface of the leaflet. It must be stripped while the leaflets are still fresh. The membrane is loosened from the leaflet at its base, the operator using his thumb nail. A dozen or more leaflets are then gathered into a bundle and the ends of the membranes seized and stripped off with a single long pull. The raffia strips are then knotted together at the small end and hung over horizontal poles to dry. They are kept in the shade for about a day, then completely dried in the sun. When dry, the raffia is done up in large twists and is then ready for the market (Fig. 14, c). The native use of raffia for cordage and in weaving has already been described.

The natives also gather various wild resins and gums for trade to Europeans, but they make little use of them themselves.

PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE

To the casual visitor it appears as though all the inhabitants of a Tanala village were on much the same economic level. There are no marked differences in the housing, clothing or food of the different families. No one appears rich, but, on the other hand, there are few signs of extreme poverty. The only individuals who seem really poor are a few old women living alone. It is only on closer acquaintance that one begins to realize the extreme importance of property in the social structure.

The material wants of the Tanala are few and easily satisfied, but property looms as large to them as to any group of European peasants and their attitude toward it is much the same. There is no display of wealth and all unnecessary expenditures are frowned upon, but there is a great love of money for its own sake. Any actual cash which comes into their hands is carefully hoarded. In spite of the severe penalties for theft and its relative rarity, the natives do not trust even their own families where money is concerned. A man who has a hoard of silver keeps it buried in some place known only to himself and usually does not divulge the fact even to his heirs until he thinks he is about to die.